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South Korea Welcomes North's Offer

Pyongyang Proposes Meeting of Legislators

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SEOUL, July 22—South Korea today tentatively welcomed a North Korean proposal for parliamentary negotiations that appears to offer the best chance for talks between the rival states in more than two years.

Leaders of South Korea's four major political parties met with their government's unification minister, Lee Hong Goo, for more than an hour today and agreed to "positively examine" North Korea's latest proposal.

In a letter delivered across the Demilitarized Zone yesterday, the chairman of the North Korean Supreme People's Council, Yang Hyung Sup, asked the speaker of the South Korean National Assembly, Kim Chae Soon, to lead a delegation of legislators to Pyongyang in August for discussions on reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula.

The North Korean proposal was a response to a recent message from the National Assembly in Seoul asking the North to cooperate on making the Seoul Olympics a success in September, although it sidestepped the Olympics question.

The week's exchanges marked the friendliest and most substantive communication between the communist North and capitalist South since Pyongyang broke off all negotiations in late 1985. They raised hopes here that relations between the two Koreas, bitter enemies since their division in 1945, could improve enough to reduce tensions at the Olympic Games, which North Korea is boycotting.

The exchanges also follow a major policy change announced by South Korean President Roh Tae Woo earlier this month. Roh said that South Korea will no longer regard North Korea as an enemy but will encourage its economic growth and international acceptance.

The Korean peninsula has been viewed as a potential flashpoint of great-power conflict since the Korean War ended inconclusively in 1953. The United States stations 43,000 troops in South Korea, while the

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Soviet Union and China support the North with weaponry.

Experts have said that, with those two communist giants opening toward the West and with South Korea moving toward democracy, relations between the two Koreas might be headed for improvement. But most experts, including South Korean and U.S. officials, have said they expect little improvement until after the Olympics, which the South has viewed as a chance to showcase its superior economic development.

The two nations have made several fitful attempts at bilateral talks since the Korean War, but none has led to improved relations. The most recent such effort was late in 1985. Those talks included discussions among legislators, negotiations between economic officials and Red Cross talks on divided families.

In yesterday's letter, the North suggested talks in Pyongyang to devise a nonaggression pact and other measures to reduce tension. The first round of talks would be followed by discussions in Seoul, with the venue alternating thereafter.

South Korean speaker Kim met with his opposition counterparts, who agreed to respond by the end of next week. Observers here said the response is likely to suggest a preliminary meeting to discuss the format of negotiations.

In the past, North Korea has proposed negotiations involving 100 or more representatives from each side, which the South has rejected as likely to produce only propaganda.

The South Korean National Assembly has 299 members, a majority of whom belong to the three opposition parties, while the North's Supreme People's Council has 655.